

**3.0****LIBBY #3****Community Background and Concerns**

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The mission of the Women's Foundation of Montana is to improve the economic status of women and girls and create a brighter future for girls and women in Montana. The Women's Foundation of Montana awarded a grant to the Lincoln County Help Line in support of that organization's activities in October 2000. Caroline Stamy 293-8754

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**3.2 Community Concerns, Comments, and Issues**

To develop a CIP that accurately reflects community interests and concerns, EPA depends heavily upon information obtained during "Community Interviews." From December 1999 through April 2000, EPA conducted interviews with a wide spectrum of area residents and representatives, such as community leaders, elected officials, business representatives, and community service workers. The interview questions are contained in Appendix F. The responses from these interviews are grouped according to similar themes. EPA has made every effort to include all the responses from the interviews as well as information from residents that has been shared subsequent to the interviews.

It is important to emphasize that this section presents the opinions and concerns of residents and other interviewees rather than those of EPA, the state, or any PRPs. The information obtained in the interviews and subsequent conversations is summarized in this section. It reflects interviewees' responses and residents' concerns regardless of whether those responses or perceptions are factually precise.

## Community Background and Concerns

The following general areas of concerns, comments, and issues have been identified from the community interviews and other sources:

- Health Risks;
- Health Care;
- Exposure Pathways / Contamination Source
- Perception of Current Risk;
- Sampling and Risk Assessment;
- Cleanup;
- Stigma;
- Environmental Justice;
- EPA's Outreach and Education Role;
- Communication; and
- Miscellaneous.

### Health Risks

The main concerns identified are health related. Many people are concerned about their health, their family friends and neighbors health. A concern that was expressed repeatedly was worry about kids today in Libby and making sure that they don't get exposed to asbestos.

People want to know how family members, friends and acquaintances contracted cancer. Some people are concerned because the previous owners of their home had cancer and they wonder whether it was from the air in the home. There is concern about cancer levels in certain neighborhoods.

Issues related to taking care of dying friends and family are often expressed. There are many emotional, psychological, stress and grief issues. There is difficulty in understanding how two or more people could have worked together in the same places at the mine, but only some have asbestos-related illness and others don't.

Questions related to how to live with a diagnosis of an asbestos related disease are common. Some people expressed fear of being diagnosed even when they feel they may have an asbestos-related illness. There is concern about the latency period of asbestos-related illnesses. People are scared because they know that even if they don't have an asbestos-related disease now, they could get one in the future. The fact that there is no cure makes it especially scary.

With regard to other diseases, some feel that rates of multiple sclerosis and lupus seem to be high in the population and could be related to asbestos exposure. People have expressed scepticism about diagnoses of asthma or emphysema, thinking that it is really asbestosis. One

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person wanted to know whether there was a relationship between arthritis and asbestos exposure.

People want to get more information on how they can protect themselves in the short term. They are wondering how the contamination is transmitted, whether it is air-borne, and if it is safe to eat **garden vegetables**.

One resident said that the medical monitoring was a good program even though the time frame was short for getting the testing done. EPA should do it again in the future - especially for children.

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- Information on potential health risks
- Effects of asbestos exposure
- Cancer in Libby (would like to see a cancer cluster study done)
- Asbestos' effects on the immune system
- Discussion- in lay terms- of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pleural plaqueing
- Smoking and asbestos exposure
- Arthritis and asbestos exposure
- Actions that can be taken to protect your health in the short term
- How the contamination is transmitted
- Information on **garden vegetables grown in soil with vermiculite**
- General air quality in Libby

### Health Care

Some people feel that medical problems have been covered up and people were deceived about how dangerous it was to work in the mine. In the past, they couldn't make their own choices about doctors. WR Grace required individuals to go to Dr. Whitehouse for diagnosis. Reports from the company to employees did not accurately reflect x-ray results.

One resident said that the medical monitoring was a good program even though the time frame was short for getting the testing done. EPA and ATSDR should do it again in the future - especially for children.

People who are ill are angry and scared about how to pay the medical bills. There is a lot of concern over ability to afford necessary medical care.

A problem that some people have run into is disability insurance not paying if a person is only working 3/4 time. It was thought that W.R. Grace should compensate them for the difference if they could only work 3/4 time.

Attorney costs was another financial problem when it came to looking for help in getting Grace to pay anything for medical costs.

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People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- Exactly what diseases asbestosis causes
- What to do if they have an asbestos-related disease
- How and where people can get tested for asbestos-related disease
- How asbestos-related disease can be distinguished from other sources of lung disease

### Exposure Pathways / Contamination Source

Possible exposure pathways was a concern that was mentioned often by those interviewed. People are particularly concerned about whether to remove vermiculite from their homes or keep it in place. They feel that there could be negative effects from living in house with vermiculite if it contains asbestos but many of them don't have the financial resources to have it removed.

Places where people feel they could potentially be exposed or have been exposed to asbestos in the past are included in the following list.

#### The mine

- mining
- driving dump trucks to and from mine
- dirty buses that went back and forth to transport workers to and from the mine
- field trips with school to the mine
- taking kids to mine in the 1980s
- hiking near the mine
- riding motorcycles up at the mine area.
- horseback riding near the mine
- hunting near the mine
- cutting Christmas trees near the mine
- getting scrap steel at mine.
- sledding up at the mine
- tours of the mine
- gathering wood near the mine
- picking mushrooms near the mine

#### The road

- uncovered mining trucks driving down Rainy Creek Road
- drivers having followed Zonolite trucks on highway with dust flying everywhere
- logging truck traffic

#### The former vermiculite processing/loading areas

- areas adjacent to the conveyor belt
- church at the river where the RainTree Nursery is now located
- Easter Sunrise service every year at Rainy Creek
- picnics at Orchard by loading dock by Rainy Creek
- the old railroad loading areas
- playing at ballfields near the old export Plant
- playing in vermiculite piles near the ballfields

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- playing in plant by City Hall
- playing in piles of Zonolite at East 7th and Lincoln Blvd (Old Zonolite Headquarters)

#### The water

- Zonolite in the Kootenai river and in Rainy Creek
- playing in Flower Creek
- playing in Libby Creek
- working at the Stud Mill by Libby Creek
- floating the river to the Screening Plant
- river fishing

#### At home

- garage reconstruction
- remodeling the house
- attic activities
- squirrels in attic stirring up vermiculite
- working on home wiring
- sweeping the house
- washing husband's clothes
- cleaning out Grandpa's pants cuffs so Grandma would let him in the house
- in gardens

#### Around Libby

- blowing dust that may contain asbestos fibers
- hauling bags to the landfill
- Flathead Community College plastered with vermiculite and plaster mix

When EPA asked about how people used or came into contact with vermiculite, people told us that the predominant use for vermiculite was as insulation material. Many people also used it as a garden amenity. Many less common uses for vermiculite were identified and recorded as follows:

#### In school

- made cookies at school in Home Economics class with it;
- used it as a science project;
- tried to put it in plaster in old junior high/now college building;
- Libby Community College was plastered with Zonolite when he went High School
- took it to school and pop it;
- plastic bags of vermiculite for boy scout jamboree;
- used for track at High School

#### At home

- kids brought pieces home, found it in yard and would heat it and pop it;
- popped it at home with cousins;
- people brought it home as gimmick to show people.
- was used to store vegetables, bulbs, etc. over the winter;
- as a mosquito repellent, Zonolite was mixed with sawdust and some pesticide. It was dyed green and felt oily;

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- turf builder;
- people played in it

### **In construction**

- mixed it into concrete in the garage;
- used in well house insulation;
- paved driveway with rock from gravel pit;
- masons and brick layers used zonolite as filler between bricks;
- used in chimneys in Libby;
- shipped to z-crete to licensee plants
- light weight roofing

### **Experimentally**

- experimenting with feeding it to hogs.
- put it in vitamins.
- used it as diet food.

### **Commercially**

- Zonolite made sheet rock, fiberglass;
- dry kilns - large sheds that were used to dry lumber
- fill for Purina animal food

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- The asbestos content of vermiculite: at the mine, after popping/processing, as a finished product for sale?

### **Perception of Current Risk**

EPA wanted to hear from residents whether there were areas in and around Libby that they believe still present a risk from asbestos to residents. Residents and other interested parties have a variety of ideas about current potential sources of contamination. They identified the following places as potentially contaminated and requested that many of them be sampled.

#### **Areas associated with the mine**

- mine itself, from wind, erosion
- anywhere near the mine
- greenhouse at Rainy Creek
- ball fields by river
- old mill expanding plant at E. 5<sup>th</sup> / Lincoln Blvd and Michigan Ave. area
- Tub Gulch - that kids for decades have used as a party spot
- chutes in old mill
- washouts are uncovering soil, pond, etc. near the mine

#### **Large general areas**

- south end of town
- west end of Libby

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- homes in the Libby area
- homes near the River
- Sheep Range at the end of Kootenai River Road
- along the River and Rainy Creek, Deltas of incoming creeks
- whole general area of Libby
- homes that used vermiculite in gardens
- Carney Creek area
- piles on end of 5th Street where old W.R. Grace HQ was located
- wind still brings dust into town from
- any housing development built on or near the mine site
- Em Kavan village

#### Specific areas

- Airfield Park
- J. Neils Park
- area by Senior Center between hospital and RR tracks
- Central School insulation
- track at high school
- skating rinks at local schools
- 2<sup>nd</sup> street where they used to park mine trucks overnight before they got the space near the old ballfields
- industrial park
- by hospital
- riprap brought down from mine for Flower Creek after flooding
- other ballfields - Legion and the Kelly/Walleston fields
- River's Edge Trailor Park
- sheds in back of City Hall

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- How to get vermiculite insulation removed from their homes

## Sampling and Risk Assessment

There were some concerns associated with the sampling process.

Some people had concerns about the way insulation material was sampled and the representativeness of the samples. Someone thought that samples were taken from the top layer, but what is filtering down into the house is from the bottom layer.

Some residents reported having independent testing done that showed higher levels of tremolite than EPA results showed. They were concerned at having two different values for results.

Many people are frustrated with the amount of time that it is taking to get results for the samples that were taken from their homes. Many people still want to have their homes sampled.

## Community Background and Concerns

EPA asked people if they wanted to be involved in the EPA risk assessment and there were several ways in which people wanted to be involved.

Many people said they would help in any way they could. They offered to answer whatever questions they could in an effort to help EPA assess the risk in the Libby area. Many people said they would just like to continue to come to meetings. Some said they would attend Community Advisory Group meetings. People would like to continue to receive information in the mail. Some said they would volunteer some time while other were too busy to volunteer but wanted to stay informed through the papers or mailings or meetings.

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- Results of sampling
- Current findings
- Asbestos content of finished vermiculite product
- How to get their homes tested for asbestos.
- How the air in Libby compares to other areas in the region

### Cleanup

This section describes the community concerns and issues associated with the cleanup activities.

Many people are concerned about getting vermiculite removed from their homes. Some people have expressed concern and confusion about what to do with vermiculite since EPA has asked homeowners not to handle it. Some have vermiculite dust sifting out of areas which are not well-sealed. Others have begun renovation projects and have vermiculite exposed in the living areas.

There has been some concern that the cleanups at the former export and screening plants are causing asbestos fibers to be released into the air and exposing Libby residents to harmful levels of asbestos.

Some people wanted to ensure that soil would be covered during transport. Traffic in general as a result of a large scale soil cleanup was a concern. People are especially concerned about Rainy Creek road.

Some people feel that the Glory Hole should be investigated for cleanup.

Some people have expressed concerns about being responsible for cleanup costs if they were the ones that put vermiculite in a given location.

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- How a homeowner can make a building safe if there is a risk of exposure.
- Cleaning up the ambient air in Libby



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## Stigma

This section describes the community concerns associated with the "stigma" on the community because of the publicity about asbestos.

There are economic concerns about decreasing property values. People in Libby are concerned that the publicity about contamination affects their property values. Some people have reported being denied loans to buy a home because of vermiculite in the home.

There is concern about the stigma brought to the town because of the bad press Libby has received. People want the EPA to help remove stigma on the community once the cleanup is complete. The Agency could work with the press to help get the stigma off the community.

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- How to get a letter that says there is no risk from asbestos for a potential home buyer
- What the contamination issue has done to real estate values

## Environmental Justice

Although environmental justice was not a concern expressed in any of the community interviews, there may be some issues associated with environmental justice. Many discussions with community members as the project has developed have focused on the issue of a large number of Libby residents living on a low income and not being able to afford services that could reduce or eliminate exposure to vermiculite in their homes. Vermiculite from Libby which contains tremolite asbestos has been shown to cause a variety of asbestos-related illnesses. There is concern on the part of many community members that just having vermiculite in their homes can potentially cause asbestos-related illnesses.

People identified the following things that they wanted more information about.

- Environmental Justice Small Grants

## Communication

Many ways of getting information were identified by those who were interviewed. Two ways of getting the information that they already had about the site stood out. Most people had gotten information:

- Directly from EPA either in the newspaper, on the radio, on the internet, at meetings, through direct mailings, or at the Information Center; or
- By talking to people in the community either neighbors or community leaders;

People identified the following methods as the best ways of communicating with them.

- The Montanian & Western News (14)

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- cable TV - Channel 10 (14)
- direct Mailings (13)
- radio - Swap shop and Voices of the Kootenai(11)
- word of mouth (7)
- meetings (5)
- TV News (5)
- EPA Information Center (3)
- flyers @ Drs office (2)
- grocery store bags (2)
- around town on reader boards (2)
- flyers through USPS
- web sites (2)
- e-mail (1)
- without media (1)
- call in phone number(1)

People gave many suggestions for the best media to use to get the communication out. Newspapers were almost unanimously agreed upon as good ways to get information to people in Libby. Many people also mentioned the cable TV channel for announcements of events and activities. TV News was not as popular but was also mentioned several times.

Direct mail and fact sheets and flyers were mentioned by many residents as being very effective in getting information to them. The local Radio station was also mentioned as one of the best ways.

Word of mouth was thought to be effective in Libby.

For the most part people believe that meetings, both EPA and community meetings, are a good way to update residents.

Schools were suggested as good places to get information out to community members about the sampling and cleanup.

The EPA Information Center at 501 Mineral Ave. was mentioned as effective at providing a place for residents to find someone to answer questions for them or refer them to the correct person to talk to. Many people also appreciated the written information that was available to them at the Center.

It was recommended that EPA use all these organizations and methods.

### Meetings

The majority of people who EPA interviewed believed that meetings they had attended were helpful. People felt that meetings in the community provide useful information and updates about the sampling and cleanup. Meetings provide useful opportunities to ask questions and hear new information. Meetings are a way to have people be accountable because they have to answer questions that community members pose.

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A couple of people said they were too busy to attend the meetings or that they didn't know about them. One person commented that it was difficult to get to the meetings because they were always in the evening.

People provided EPA with many suggestions on community locations where meetings could be held. Some of the suggestions for meeting places were.

- Memorial Gym-41
- City Hall - 23
- VFW 13
  
- Venture Inn Conf. Rooms 3
- Wilkinson Building 1
- National Guard Armory-2
- Lumber Mill - 1
- Schools-2
- High School Gym5
- School Gym (ASA Wood)-1
- Sports Rehab Building
- Restaurants -1
- Churches-2
- Masons (across from Hidden Chapel)
- USFS Conference

The numbers after the meeting place indicate the number of times that meeting place was mentioned.

### Miscellaneous

EPA asked if there were other concerns or issues people had about the mine or vermiculite, and the following responses were recorded. EPA realizes that there be many more concerns than are listed in this plan and encourages residents and interested parties to call EPA with any concerns or information that they believe the Agency should know.

Many people feel that the problems have been covered up and people couldn't make their own choices about whether to work at the mine, knowing that it was a hazardous occupation.

Some think that there are people in the community who are in denial about the problems of asbestos.

Many parents didn't even know where the mine was located until last hunting season.

A lot of people are diagnosed in Libby with asbestos-related illnesses.

Too bad the EPA didn't shut the mine down years ago.

Glory Hole has a lot of bad stuff buried in it including dumped oil drums. There is concern about digging there.

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Fish brought home from the Lower pond located below tailings smelled heavily like diesel/gas. Only kids under 12 could fish there. State Fish and Game found diesel in the fish when they analyzed it.

People got a good pay check working at the mine and they knew it was dangerous.

"The reclamation process at mine was to done to satisfaction and should be looked at. It's a tremendous scar on the landscape."

In the 1980s-1990s: EPA made recommendations regarding what measures would need to be taken to keep Rainy Creek road open. The County did not have resources to have a water truck make daily runs so it decided only to post a no trespassing sign. Current owners, Owens- Hurst, are not abiding by EPA recommendations made in an EIS and there should be follow-up. There is still a lot of activity on Rainy Creek Road - logging, hunting, partying, sampling, sightseeing, and wildlife watching.